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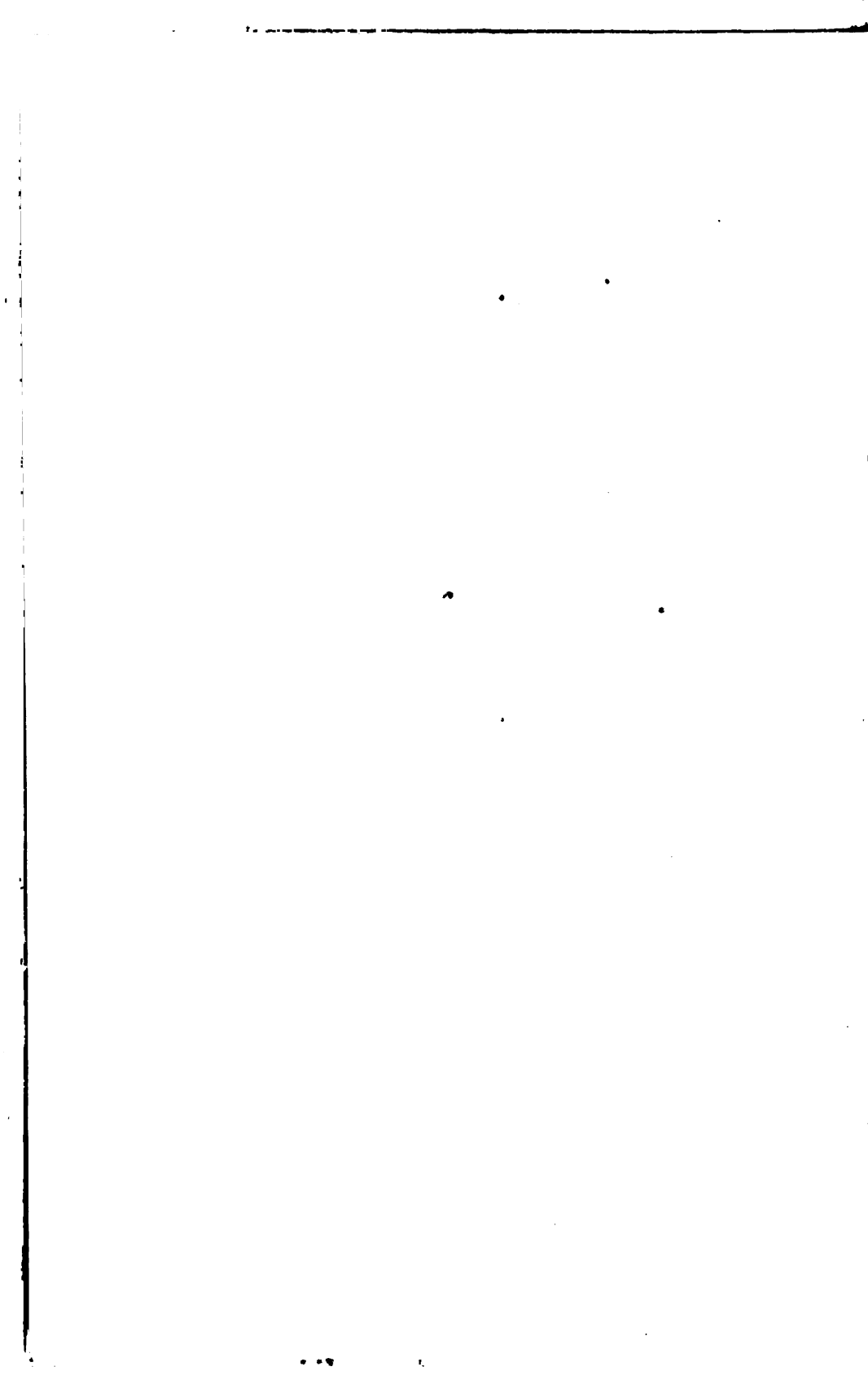
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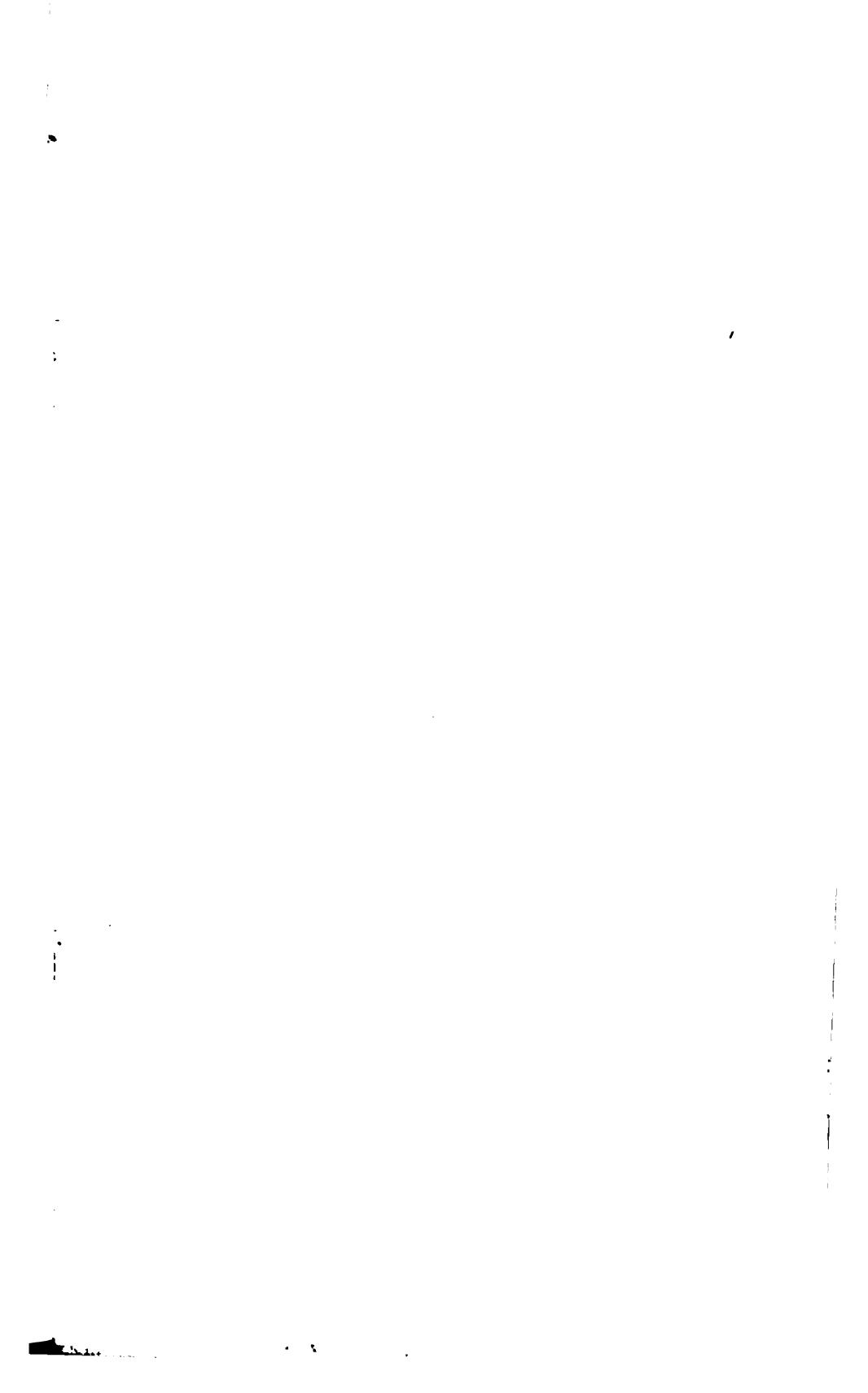
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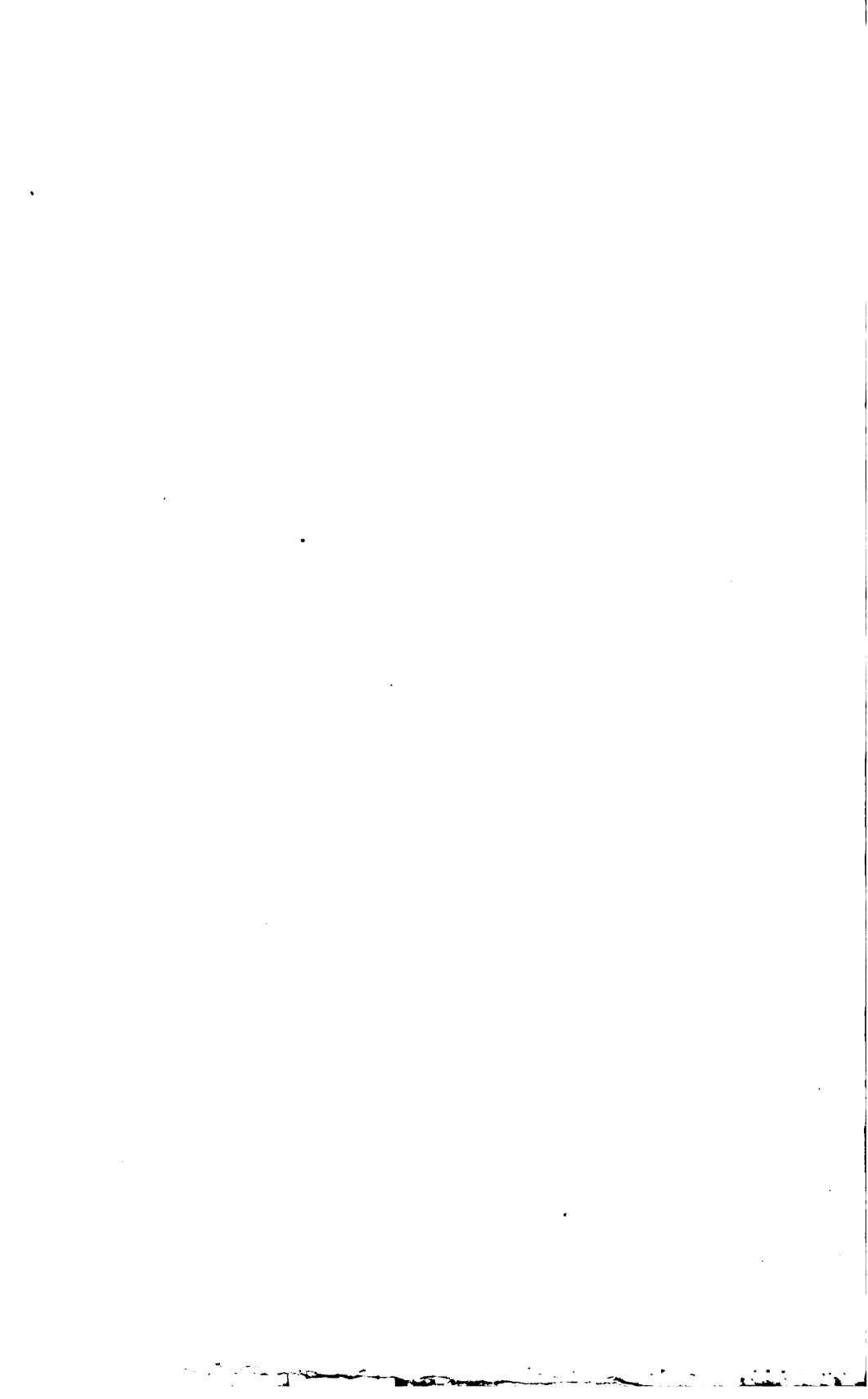
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MRS. GAMP
WITH
The Strolling Players
BY
CHARLES DICKENS

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MRS. GAMP
WITH THE
STROLLING PLAYERS







MRS. GAMP
with the Strolling Players

AN
UNFINISHED
SKETCH
BY
CHARLES DICKENS



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NOTE

IN 1847, while "Dombey & Son" was appearing in its monthly parts, Dickens, during his leisure planned a theatrical benefit for Leigh Hunt, then in destitute circumstances. The actors were to be amateurs, artists and authors, friends of Hunt. Among those associated with Dickens in the scheme were John Forster, Frank Stone, Augustus Egg, John Leech, George Cruik-

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shank, Douglas Jerrold, Mark Lemon, Dudley Costello, and George Henry Lewes. The plan had originally included several performances in London, but Hunt having been meanwhile granted a pension of two hundred pounds a year, the plan was modified, and the performances were limited to two, the first at Manchester on July 26th, and the second at Liverpool, July 28th. At both places Ben Jonson's comedy, *Every Man in His Humour*, was followed on the first night by *A Good Night's Rest*, and *Turning the Tables*, and on the second night by *Comfortable Lodgings, or Paris in 1750*.

The friends interested in the enterprise had hoped to raise five hundred

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guineas, but the net profit from the two performances was a hundred pounds short of this sum. A short time after their return, Dickens wrote to Forster telling him at length of a scheme of his for raising this additional amount. He contemplated writing a humorous account of their trip to Manchester and Liverpool, which was to be illustrated by Cruikshank, Leech, and the other artists of the party. It was to be written in the character of Mrs. Gamp, and was to have the title: "An Account of a late expedition into the North, for an Amateur Theatrical Benefit, written by Mrs. Gamp (who was an eye-witness), inscribed to Mrs. Harris, edited by Charles Dickens, and published,

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with illustrations on wood by so and so, in aid of the Benefit Fund." Dickens outlined the plan of the story in a long letter to Forster. The following are extracts :

The argument would be, that Mrs. Gamp, being on the eve of an excursion to Margate as a relief from her professional fatigue, comes to the knowledge of the intended excursion of our party ; hears that several of the ladies concerned are in an interesting situation ; and decides to accompany the party unbeknown, in a second-class carriage—"in case." There she finds a gentleman from the Strand in a checked suit, who is going down with the wigs and to his politeness Mrs. Gamp is indebted for much support and countenance during the excursion. She will describe the whole thing in her own manner:

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sitting, in each place of performance, in the orchestra, next the gentleman who plays the kettle-drums. She gives her critical opinion of Ben Jonson as a literary character, and refers to the different members of the party, in the course of her description of the trip: having always an invincible animosity towards Jerrold, for Caudle reasons. She addresses herself generally to Mrs. Harris, to whom the book is dedicated—but is discursive. Amount of matter, half a sheet of *Dom-bey*: may be a page or so more, but not less. Mac will make a little garland of the ladies for the title-page. Egg and Stone will themselves originate something fanciful, and I will settle with Cruikshank and Leech. I have no doubt the little thing will be droll and attractive.

Unfortunately he could not get

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the help he needed in the affair, and only a part of the first chapter was written. This has been here for the first time printed separately from the original manuscript.



MRS. GAMP
WITH
THE STROLLING PLAYERS



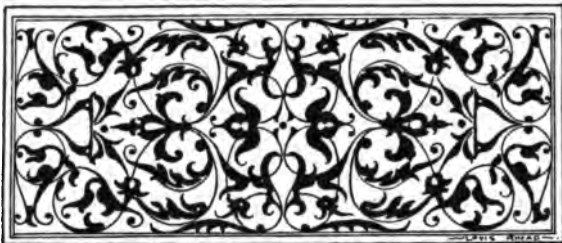
A NEW
PILJIAN'S PROJISS

WRITTEN BY M^r GAMP

EDITED BY CHARLES DICKENS



LONDON



MRS. GAMP'S ACCOUNT OF
HER CONNEXION WITH
THE AFFAIR

WHICH Mrs. Harris's own words to me, was these: 'Sairey Gamp,' she says, 'why not go to Margate?' 'Srimps,' says that dear creetur, 'is to your liking, Sairey; why not go to Margate for a week, bring your constitootion up with srimps, and come back to them loving 'arts as knows and wallies of you, blooming? Sairey,' Mrs. Harris says, 'you are but poorly. Don't denigh it, Mrs. Gamp, for

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books is in your looks. You must have rest. Your mind,' she says, 'is too strong for you; it gets you down and treads upon you, Sairey. It is useless to disguise the fact,—the blade is a-wearing out the sheets.' 'Mrs. Harris,' I says to her, 'I could not undertake to say, and I will not deceive you, Ma'am, that I am the woman I could wish to be. The time of worrit, as I had with Mrs. Colliber, the baker's lady, who was so bad in her mind with her first, that she would not so much as look at bottled stout, and kept to gruel through the month, has aged me, Mrs. Harris. But, Ma'am,' I says to her, 'talk not of Margate, for if I goes anywhere, it is elsewhere, and not there.' 'Sairey,' says Mrs. Harris, solemn, 'whence this mystery?

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If I have ever deceived the hardest-working, soberest, and best of women, which her name is well beknown, is S. Gamp, Midwife, Kingsgate Street, High Holborn, mention it. If not,' says Mrs. Harris, with the tears a-standing in her eyes, 'reweal your intentions.' 'Yes, Mrs. Harris,' says I, 'I will. Well I knows you, Mrs. Harris, well you knows me, well we both knows wot the characters of one another is. Mrs. Harris then,' I says, 'I *have* heerd as there *is* a expedition goin' down to Manjester and Liverspool, a play-acting. If I goes anywheres for change, it is along with that.' Mrs. Harris clasps her hands, and drops into a chair, as if her time was come—which I know'd it couldn't be, by rights, for six weeks odd. 'And have I lived to

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hear,' she says, 'of Sairey Gamp, as always kept herself respectable, in company with play-actors!' 'Mrs. Harris,' I says to her, 'be not alarmed—not reg'lar play-actors — hammertoors.' 'Thank Evans!' says Mrs. Harris, and bustiges into a flood of tears.

When the sweet creetur had com-poged herself (which a sip of brandy and water warm, and sugared pleasant, with a little nutmeg did it), I proceeds with these words, 'Mrs. Harris, I am told as these hammer-toors are litterary and artistickle.' 'Sairey,' says that best of wimmen, with a shiver and a slight relapse, go on! It might be worse.' 'I likewise hears,' I says to her, 'that they're a-goin' play-acting, for the benefit of two litterary men. One as had his wrongs a long time ago,

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and has got his rights at last—and one as has made a many people merry in his time, but is now dull and sick and lonely his own self, indeed! Sairey,' says Mrs. Harris, 'you're an English woman, and that's no bus'ness of you'rn.' 'No, Mrs. Harris,' I says. 'That's very true; I hopes I knows my dooty and my country. But,' I says, 'I am informed as there is Ladies in this party, and that half a dozen of 'em, if not more, is in various stages of a interesting state. Mrs. Harris, you and me well knows what Ingeins often does. If I accompanies this expedition, unbeknown and second cladge, may I not combine my calling with change of air, and prove a service to my feller creeturs?' 'Sairey,' was Mrs. Harris's reply, 'you seem born to be

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a blessing to your sex and bring 'em through it. Good go with you! But keep your distance till called in. Lord bless you, Mrs. Gamp; for people is known by the company they keeps, and literary and artistickle society might be the ruin of you before you was aware, with your best customers, both sick and monthly, if they took a pride in themselves.'

MRS. GAMP IS DESCRIPTIVE

The number of the cab had a seven in it I think, and a ought I know, and if this should meet his eye (which it was a black 'un, new done, that he saw with; the other was tied up), I give him warning that he'd better take that umbereller and patten to the Hackney Coach Office, before he repents it. He was

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a young man in a weskit with sleeves to it and strings behind, and needn't flatter himself with a supposition of escape, as I gave this description of him to the Police the moment I found he had drove off with my property, and if he thinks there an't laws enough he's much mistook. I tell him that.

I do assure you, Mrs. Harris, when I stood in the railways office that morning with my bundle on my arm and one patten in my hand, you might have knocked me down with a feather, far less porkmangers which was a-bumping against me, continual and sewere, all around. I was drove about like a brute animal and almost worritted into fits, when a gentleman¹ with a large shirt-collar

1. George Cruikshank.

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and a hook nose, and a eye like one of Mr. Sweedlepipes's hawks, and long locks of hair, and wiskers that I wouldn't have no lady as I was engaged to, meet suddenly, a-turning round a corner, for any sum of money you could offer me, says, laughing, 'Halloa, Mrs. Gamp, what are *you* up to!' I didn't know him from Adam (except by his clothes), but I says, faintly, 'if you're a Christian man, shew me where to get a second cladge ticket for Manjester, and have me put in a carriage, or I shall drop.' Which he kindly did, in a cheerful kind of a way, skipping about in the strangest manner as ever I see, making all kinds of actions, and looking and vinking at me from under the brims of his hat (which was a good deal turned up) to that



F. W. Partridge del.

Mr. Gamps departure.



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extent, that I should have thought he meant somethink, but for being so flurried as not to have no thoughts at all until I was put in a carriage along with a individgle—the politest ever I see—in a shepherd's plaid suit, with a long gold watch-guard hanging round his neck, and his hand a-trembling through nervousness, worse than a aspian leaf.

‘I’m wery ‘appy, Ma’am,’ he says—the politest vice as ever I heerd!—‘to go down with a lady belonging to our party.’

‘Our party, Sir!’ I says.

‘Yes, Ma’am,’ he says, ‘I’m Mr. Wilson. I’m going down with the wigs.’

Mrs. Harris, wen he said he was a going down with the wigs, such was my state of confugion and worrit

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that I thought he must be connected with the Government in some ways or another, but directly-moment he explains himself, for he says :

‘ There’s not a theatre in London worth mentioning that I don’t attend punctually. There’s five and twenty wigs in them boxes, Ma’am,’ he says, a-pinting towards a heap of luggage—‘ as was worn at the Queen’s Fancy Ball. There’s a black wig, Ma’am,’ he says, ‘ as was worn by Garrick ; there’s a red one, Ma’am,’ he says, ‘ as was worn by Kean ; there’s a brown one, Ma’am,’ he says, ‘ as was worn by Kemble ; there’s a grey one, Ma’am,’ he says, ‘ as was made for Cooke ; there’s a white one, Ma’am,’ he says, ‘ as I measured Mr. Young for myself. There’s a flaxen one as was got up express for

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Jenny Lind the night she came out at the Italian Opera. It was very much applauded was that wig, Ma'am, through the evening. It had a great reception. The audience broke out the moment they see it.'

'Are you in Mr. Sweedlepipes's line, Sir?' I says.

'Which is that, Ma'am?' he says—the softest and genteelest vice I ever heerd, I do declare, Mrs. Harris!

'Hair-dressing,' I says.

'Yes, Ma'am,' he replies, 'I have that honor. Do you see this, Ma'am?' he says, holding up his right hand.

'I never see such a trembling,' I says to him, and I never did!

'All along of her Majesty's Costume Ball, Ma'am,' he says. 'The

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excitement did it. Two hundred and fifty-seven ladies of the first rank and fashion, had their heads got up on that occasion by this hand, and my t'other one. I was at it eight and forty hours, on my feet, Ma'am, without rest. It was a Powder Ball, Ma'am. We have a Powder piece at Liverspool. Have I the pleasure,' he says, looking at me curious, 'of addressing Mrs. Gamp?'

'Gamp, I am, Sir,' I replies, 'Both by name and natur.'

'Would you like to see your beecograffer's moostache and wiskers, Ma'am?' he says. 'I've got 'em in this box.'

'Drat my beecograffer, Sir,' I says; 'he has given me no reageon to wish to know anythink about him.'

'Oh, Mrs. Gamp, I ask your

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parden'—I never see such a polite man, Mrs. Harris! 'P'raps,' he says, 'if you're not of the party, you don't know who it was that assisted you into this carriage?'

'No, Sir,' I says, 'I don't, indeed.'

'Why, Ma'am,' he says, a-wisper-in', 'that was George, Ma'am.'

'What George, Sir? I don't know no George,' says I.

'The great George, Ma'am,' says he. 'The Crookshanks.'

If you'll believe me, Mrs. Harris, I turns my head, and see the wery man a-making picters of me on his thumb-nail, at the winder! while another of 'em—a tall, slim, mel-ancolly gent,¹ with dark hair and a bage vice—looks over his shoulder, with his head o' one side, as if he

1. John Leech.

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had understood the subject, and coolly says, 'I've draw'd her several times—in Punch,' he says too! the owldacious wretches!

'Which I never touches, Mr. Wilson,' I remarks out aloud—I couldn't have helped it, Mrs. Harris, if you had took my life for it!—'Which I never touches, Mr. Wilson, on account of the Lemon!'

'Hush!' says Mr. Wilson, 'There he is!'

I only see a fat gentleman¹ with curly black hair and a merry face, a-standing on the platform, rubbing his two hands over one another, as if he was washing of 'em, and shaking his head and shoulders wery much; and I was a-wondering wot Mr. Wilson meant, wen he says, 'There's Dougladge,²

1. Mark Lemon. 2. Douglas Jerrold.

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Mrs. Gamp!' he says. 'There's him as wrote the life of Mrs. Caudle!'

Mrs. Harris, wen I see that little willain bodily before me, it give me such a turn, that I was all in a tremble! If I hadn't lost my umbereller in the cab, I must have done him a injury with it! Oh, the bragian little trator! right among the ladies—Mrs. Harris, cocking his wickedest and deceitfullest of eyes while he was a-talking to 'em—laughing at his own jokes as loud as you please—holding his hat in one hand to cool his-self, and tossing back his iron-grey mop of a head of hair with the other, as if it was so much shavings—there, Mrs. Harris, I see him, getting encouragement from the pretty and weak creeturs which never know'd that sweet Saint, Mrs. C., as I did,

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and being treated with as much confidence as if he'd never violated none of the domestic ties, and never shewed up nothing! Oh, the aggravation of that Dougladge! Mrs. Harris, if I hadn't apologised to Mr. Wilson, and put a little bottle to my lips, which was in my pocket for the journey, and which it is very rare indeed I have about me, I could not have abared the sight of him—there, Mrs. Harris! I could not—I must have tore him, or give way and fainted.

While the bell was a-ringing, and the luggage of the hammertoors in great confugion—very litterary indeed—was being handed up, Mr. Wilson was as polite as ever. 'That,' he says, 'Mrs. Gamp, a-pinting to an officer-looking gen-

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tleman,¹ that a lady with a little basket was a-taking care on, 'is another of our party. He's a author too—continually going up the walley of the Muses, Mrs. Gamp.'

'Them,' he says, alluding to a fine-looking, portly gentleman,² with a face like a amiable moon, and a short, mild gent³ with a pleasant smile, 'is two of our artists, Mrs. G., vell beknowed at the Royal Academy, as sure as Stones is Stones, and Eggs is Eggs. This resolute gent,'⁴ he says, 'a-coming along here as is aperently going to take the railways by storm—him with the tight legs, and his weskit very much buttoned, and his mouth very much shut, and his coat a-flying open, and his heels a-giving it

1. Dudley Costello. 2. Frank Stone. 3. Augustus Egg. 4. John Forster.

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to the platform—is a cricket, and our pringlipal tragegian.’ ‘But who,’ says I, when the bell had left off, and the train had begun to move, ‘who, Mr. Wilson, is the wild gent,¹ in the perspiration that’s been a-tearing up and down all this time, with the great box of papers under his arm, a-talking to every body wery indistinct, and exciting himself, dreadful?’ ‘Why?’ says Mr. Wilson, with a smile. ‘Because, Sir,’ I says, ‘he’s being left behind.’ ‘Good God!’ cries Mr. Wilson, turning pale, and putting out his head, ‘It’s your beegraffer—the Manager—and he has got the money, Mrs. Gamp!’ Hows’ever, someone chucked him into the train, and we went off. At the first skreek of the whistle, Mrs. Harris,

1. Charles Dickens.

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I turned white, for I had took notice of some of them dear creeturs as was the cause of my being in company, and I know'd the danger that—but Mr. Wilson which was a married man, puts his hand on mine, and says: ‘Mrs. Gamp, calm yourself; it’s only the Ingein!’





